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ABSTRACT

Delivered on behalf of the International Council of Archives (ICA), this paper briefly discusses the challenge inherent in the processing and preservation of audiovisual materials, the types of media included in the term audiovisual, the concerns of professional archivists, the development and services of archival institutions, the utilization of audiovisual archives, and the need for cooperation among existing archival institutions. (ESR)

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Audiovisual Materials in Archives - a General Picture of their Role and Function

by Hans Booms, Vice President of ICA,
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Audiovisual Materials in Archives -- A General Picture of Their Role and Function

(paper to be delivered on behalf of the International Council on Archives (ICA) by Hans Booms, Vice-President of ICA and President of the Bundesarchivs of the Federal Republic of Germany, and in his absence read by Alfred Wagner, Treasurer of ICA, on 20 August 1981 to participants in Meeting 180, Cooperation in AV Materials at the 47th Council and General Conference of IFLA).

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1. Introductory Remarks

The processing and the preservation of audiovisual materials continues to be a challenge for archives in many countries. It is true photographic recording is already about 150 years old, and sound and motion picture recording cover a span of 100 and 80 years respectively in modern history. Archival theory and practice,however, remained far behind and followed that technological development in a lengthy process of integrating the audiovisuals in the whole of potential archival holdings. And even for a longer period scholarly historians had been adhering to the idea that photographs, sound-recordings and film were to be regarded only as adjuncts to written records and - I may add - literary sources.

However, in our century the use which is made of AV material, in modern society, has been increasing considerably from decade to decade. Nowadays, pictorial and acoustic information, as media of mass communication, is being used to an extent which has already raised it -- as part of the nation's archival heritage -- to a similar rank and position as had been monopolized, over the past millennia in the history of mankind, by the written record.

While scholarly manuals on the methodology of history and historical research, published in the age of historism, had been nearly exclusively based on the use of written records, the archivist of our time has learnt to appreciate the unique significance of all kinds of non-written information for the evolution of modern society. It is the inherent historical and scientific, educational and cultural value of audiovisual materials which in our time has immensely enlarged the public, political as well as the scholarly interest in the use of archival holdings.

2. Definition

The term "audiovisual archives" is a collective one. In general all pictorial or acoustic information or the combination of them, fixed on different support such as tape, disc, film, are called audiovisual. In practice, the definition of the material requires particular approaches for the different types of audiovisual information.
Pictorial information was a part of archival holdings long before photography had been invented 150 years ago. Maps, drawings, sketches, crests, illuminations of manuscripts, posters, etc. are examples of pictorial archives which are not considered for the purpose of this paper. All photographs, Daguerreotypes as well as glass-negatives and paper-positives, diapositives or slides are part of "audiovisual material" which may be dealt with in archives.

Acoustic information are the sound recordings on all possible supports and of any technique of fixation which ever have been in use from the origin of sound-recording a century ago; they too may be part of the archival holdings of an institution.
Moving images mean series of pictorial information recorded on a support like film, tape or disc, and which, when projected, convey the impression of motion. For more than 80 years moving images

without accompanying sound are known; for half a century films have been produced with sound. Videographic production has come into being not longer than two decades ago. All kinds of moving images may form part of the audiovisual archival heritage, whether they originate from private or public cinematographic productions or for broadcasting purposes from television production.

3. The archival approach

Already in 1972 the International Council on Archives had initiated a first survey and report on the handling of audiovisual material. The survey had been prepared in the Bundesarchiv, based on a worldwide questionnaire, and was presented to the VIIth International Congress on Archives, Moscow 1972, by my colleague, Wolfgang Kothe. Since 1974, ICA joined the activities of Unesco's Division for Cultural Heritage aiming at a recommendation for the safeguarding and preservation of moving images, i.e. all kinds of film and video-materials. The General Assembly of Unesco, as you know, unanimously accepted the relevant recommendation on 26 October 1980 during its 21st General-Conference in Belgrade. Experience of ICA's Executive Committee with the difficult question of copyright and related problems during recent years encouraged us to set up a working group for audiovisual archives in Spring 1981. The major aim of that small coordinating body is to shape a policy for ICA's cooperation with international organizations specialized in audiovisual archives. A first meeting with representatives of FIAF (the International Federation of Film Archives), of FIAT (the International Federation of Television Archives), of IASA (the International Federation of Sound Archives) and of IFLA took place in April 1981 in Brussels, hosted by my colleague, Carlos Wyffels, l'Archiviste Général du Royaume de Belgique. IFLA was represented in Brussels by A. L. van Wesemael, Deputy Secretary General of IFLA and its Coordinator of Professional Activities, and by Ed Spruit from The Hague. The basic idea of an intrinsic cooperation on the international level is the need to promote the long-term process of "professionalizing" the handling of audiovisual material. This process requires the cooperation across all specialized

traditions of theory and methodology.
However, as the representative of ICA, I appreciate the opportunity to emphasize: differing from the handling of audiovisual materials in libraries, museums or in related collections, the professional archivist's approach to audiovisual material means the preservation of the original master material, i.e. of photographic negatives, of pre-print film negatives, etc., but not of prints, copies or other supports.
In general, archival institutions do not collect particular audiovisual items; their aim is the preservation of the audiovisual material produced by all institutions and agencies for which they are responsible. The objective is not the creation of a collection of audiovisual items, representative of a particular period or a region, or as pieces of art, but the archival handling of all the material which is transferred to the archives ex officio.

In accordance with that principle, archival institutions have to select the valuable part of the total production of audiovisual materials. The criteria for archival appraisal must include not only historical aspects but also the cultural, artistic, and educational value of the material. So, the professional aim of the archivist is not the preservation of the totality of audiovisual productions, but the shaping of the contemporary archival heritage of documentaries, fiction films, of photographs, and of sound-recordings of our time for the benefit of future generations.

4. Institutional aspects

For the professional archivist the preservation of audiovisual materials requires considerable technical measures because of their physical nature. The permanent preservation depends on the availability of technical equipment, of specialized repositories, of laboratories, etc. In addition to the considerable investments for such specialized technical installations and equipment, substantial funds are needed permanently to run the technical services.

The development of archival institutions for the preservation of audiovisual materials varies from country to country according to different national legislation for copyright and to different systems of society and economy, but also depending on different interests of historical research in making use of audiovisual materials as potential sources.

During the past decades almost all public archives on all levels (national, regional, local) have been setting up photographic laboratories and services. In most cases they too invested in technical equipment for the handling of sound-recordings. Only a few national archival institutions, however, have been able to set up technical installations for the restoration and permanent preservation of moving images.

Only in few countries governments decided to create public film archival institutions for the safeguarding and preservation of the national film productions. Even rarer are cases where film archives are in a position to legally receive master material of the national film production. More often the archival safeguarding of the national film production is left either to the film industry or to one or several private institutions, often each of them competing with each other. However, there is still a considerable number of states where no institutions at all are responsible for the archival preservation of moving images.

Undoubtedly the production of broadcasting services, as the most important media of mass communication in our time, are a challenge to archival institutions all over the world. Very often economic reasons have been emphasized to justify that the care for the archival preservation of broadcasting information is left to their services and any care by public archives in this domain be restricted. Since the mass production requires archival selection, the setting up of appraisal

criteria should not be left to non-professionals.

Winding up, I think that specialized archival institutions are inevitable as instrumental prerequisites to cover the particular needs of the safeguarding of audiovisual archives. Therefore it is not at all a question of prestige for an archival institution whether it covers and houses itself audiovisual archives or not, but a question of the most efficient handling of audiovisuals on a national level, i.e. a question of cooperation among archivists.

5. Utilization of audiovisual archives:

All archival institutions should join in a common effort to make use of the scholarly and educational exploitation of products of the film industry as well as of broadcasting corporations, including television production on a non-commercial, non-profit-oriented basis. That means that initiatives have to be taken to analyze the different national copyright legislations so that researchers get access to the archives of broadcasting corporations. "Zugang zu den Archiven ist ein Menschenrecht" - access to archives is a human right, and in the long run no material can be exempted from it.

6. The need for cooperation:

The nowadays universal problems of the economic situation and the shortcuts of public budgets and funds make it extremely difficult to initiate the establishment of new institutions equipped for the processing of audiovisual archives. Actually, the economic situation has a serious impact on the already existing archival institutions. Therefore it does not seem advisable to consider ideally conceived institutional organizations for audiovisual archives. Preferably the cooperation among existing archival institutions should be intensified at this stage of development.

Such a cooperation should serve the process of professionalization in the archival handling of all kind of audiovisual materials. The standardization of the description and of cataloguing of audiovisual archives is as important as the cooperation in the definition of appraisal criteria and methods of selection. There seems to be particular need , not only in developing but also in industrial countries, for the professional training of archivists working on audiovisual material.

Cooperation is to be developed among all librarians, curators and archivists working in the field of audiovisual archives, either in branches of public archives or in specialized institutions like the archives of broadcasting companies or film archives, in national libraries, museums or private collections. The cooperation which should be inaugurated both on the national and the international level, must include contacts with the organizations of film producers, of picture agencies, of copyright owners, and of representatives of all academic disciplines interested in the utilization of audiovisual materials.

In concluding, I wish to thank you very much indeed for having given me the chance to address the international community of librarians assembled here in Leipzig, birthplace of the idea of a German national library, of the Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels, of the bookfairs and of the spirit of international understanding, not only among librarians. What I pointed out might sound strange to you for one or another reason. But again: we are only at the starting point of a cooperation among our organizations on the handling of audiovisual material, and, I am sure, we shall enjoy continuing in future to the benefit of us all.
Thank you.